

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 19, 2010

**ILLINOIS SUPREME COURT MAKES PEER MENTOR PROGRAM
AVAILABLE TO ILLINOIS JUDGES**

The Illinois Supreme Court announced Tuesday an expansion of its judge mentoring program designed to aid judges in the performance of their judicial duties.

The new Peer Judge Mentor Program is the continuation of an initiative announced 13 months ago by Illinois Supreme Court Chief Justice Thomas R. Fitzgerald and the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts under Director Cynthia Y. Cobbs to improve public confidence in the courts and ensure judicial independence by improving the skills and performance of the Illinois judiciary.

“Judicial independence is necessarily dependent upon public confidence in the operation of our courts,” said Chief Justice Fitzgerald. “The Peer Mentoring Program, along with prior judicial performance initiatives announced by the Court, are prompted by a desire to produce the highest quality judiciary for the citizens of this state. They are designed to make a very good judiciary even better.”

The new initiative will train and assign judicial mentors to Illinois judges who seek to enhance their skills or performance. A judge’s self-referral might be prompted by participation in the Court’s Judicial Performance Evaluation Program, which was made mandatory for Illinois judges in the Supreme Court’s 2008 initiatives. In addition to providing for self-referral, the new initiative also vests in a chief circuit court judge discretion to assign a mentor to a judge who could benefit from a confidential one-on-one relationship.

Training of a corps of judicial mentors and administration of the mentoring program will be modeled after the successes of the New Judge Mentoring Program which the Court and the Administrative Office have conducted since 1998. That program was first initiated by then Chief Justice Charles E. Freeman and is considered a crucial tool in the training and development of new judges.

Several states offer mentoring programs for new judges, but Illinois is believed to be unique in making such a program available to all of its judges, said Director Cobbs.

MORE

Peer Mentor Program Add One

Illinois has one of the largest state judiciaries in the nation, and the peer mentor program will apply to all of the state's circuit and associate judges, which number about 925.

"The Peer Mentor Judge program builds on the success of our New Judge Mentor Program and on the strategies implemented by the Court in December 2008," said Director Cobbs. "It provides another tool to Illinois' judiciary as part of our continuing efforts to sustain the high standard of judicial performance currently enjoyed by Illinois citizens. The Court's performance and accountability strategies, one of which is now the Peer Mentor Program, serves the dual purpose of strengthening our judiciary and increasing public confidence."

The new mentor program will be administered by a seven-judge Judicial Mentor Committee. The committee, assisted by the Administrative Office, will develop criteria to match mentors with judges, review the mentors' contact reports for the purpose of offering recommendations to the Supreme Court for modifications in the program and to make an annual report to the Supreme Court on the operation of the program.

With the aid of the chief judge of each circuit, The Judicial Mentor Committee will annually certify the mentors for each circuit from names submitted by the chief judges.

A judge nominated by the chief judge of the circuit to become a mentor must have a minimum of three years of prior judicial service; willingness to devote the additional time needed to fulfill the duties of a mentor; a demonstrated commitment to judicial education and the ability to interact positively with judges.

Retired judges who are not actively engaged in the practice of law also may serve as mentors.

The Judicial Mentor Committee also is charged with developing training for peer mentors and a mentoring manual.

"The Peer Judge Mentor Program will give chief judges another tool to try to help trial judges do their jobs better," said Chief Circuit Judge S. Gene Schwarm of the Fourth Judicial Circuit, who is chair of the Judicial Mentor Committee. "We know from the new judge mentoring program, that mentoring works. This is another remedial step to help a judge who has been identified, either through the Judicial Evaluation Program or other means, as having issues that can be solved through mutual cooperation, respect and understanding between the mentor and mentee.

An assignment of a judge to the Peer Mentor Program is for a period of at least six months but no longer than a year. It will be characterized by a relationship of confidentiality, understanding and trust between the mentor and mentee. The mentor will complete a contact report after each meeting which contains a generalized description of the subjects discussed.

MORE

Peer Mentor Program

Add Two

The reports will be submitted regularly to the Judicial Mentor Committee through the chief judge of the circuit.

In addition to Chief Judge Schwarm, the other members of the Judicial Mentor Committee are Appellate Court Justice Michael J. Burke of Elmhurst in the Second Judicial District; Circuit Judge Dan L. Flannell of Sullivan in the Sixth Judicial Circuit; Circuit Judge David K. Frankland of Albion in the Second Judicial Circuit; Circuit Judge Robert C. Marsaglia of Morris in the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit; Circuit Judge Elizabeth A. Robb of Bloomington in the Eleventh Judicial Circuit; and Associate Judge James E. Snyder of Chicago in the Cook County Circuit.

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